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TITLE: Cultures and Communities: Youth Development through Culture Identity-Building and Service Learning.

AUTHORS: Barbara A. Collins, ETR Associates, Santa Cruz, C A

ISSUE: Risk reduction interventions for youth have not accounted for the role of cultural identity and cross-culture skills in risk-taking. The interrelationships between cultural identity, the capacity to function in the dominant culture, and risk behaviors merit further explorations.

SETTING: Behavioral and social science intervention research in court-supported alternative high schools in northern California.

PROJECT: Cultures and Communities is a 16-week intervention that develops youths' social skills, builds cultural knowledge and strengthens cultural identity in African American, Southeast Asian, Mexican American and European American teens on probation. The program includes a trust-building "challenge course" and culminates in a month long service learning project whereby youths contribute to their communities in positive ways.

RESULTS: The intervention has been piloted with five multicultural groups and participants have gained in hi-cultural self-efficacy, positive cross-cultural attitudes and behavior and ethnic identity, sense of competence and self-esteem. Pilot data suggest positive relationships between cultural identity building and educational commitment.

LESSONS LEARNED: While gains can be made during the intervention period, sustaining those gains over time is not as easy. In our current study, we will pursue enhancing supports for youths' behavior change and will conduct a delayed posttest to determine retention.

PRESENTER CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Barbara A. Collins

Address: ETR Associates

P.O. Box 1830

Santa Cruz, CA 95061-1830

Telephone: (831) 438-4060 X173

Fax: (831) 438-3618

E-mail: barbara@etr-associates.org